

The Sacred Cross of the Channel Islands

Located twenty-one miles due South of Santa Barbara Harbor, Santa Cruz is an island whose shores are bold, broken cliffs jutting up from the ocean depths, with innumerable coves and many exciting caves. It is an island twenty-one miles long and six miles wide, the largest of a group of islands off the Southern California coast called the Channel Islands. Its 62,500 acres compose one of the largest cattle ranches in the nation. Inland, on the island's gentle slopes, you will find groves of eucalyptus, almond, palm, walnut, and orange trees; while elsewhere steep canyons and rugged irregular hills will be dotted with pine, live oak, and scrub oak. Wildlife on this fertile isle consists of fox and spotted island skunk, wild boar, and wild sheep, while in and among the many caves along the shore you will find innumerable sea lions. This beautiful island, one of several located so close off our Southern California coast, has an extremely interesting, but little known, historical background.

The story of Santa Cruz Island begins about 45,000 years ago when it was still a part of what is now the California mainland. Then a massive upheaval separated the Channel Islands from the coast and the chasm between filled with ocean. Thousands of years later when that part of the continent became inhabited with aboriginals, these offshore islands also became populated by groups of natives who came to be known as the Island Canalino Indians. Theirs was a highly developed culture; the indians were good fishermen and made sturdy

canoes used in trading among the islands. Although they made many trips to the mainland, they preferred to remain on the islands, for here they found an easy life, with an abundance of animals and sea life to support their population. At one time these indians numbered 20,000, but by the middle of the nineteenth century the last indian had left the islands. The rest of the Canalino Indians by then had either been assimilated with mainland indians or been killed off by white man germs or ruthless whalers and hunters.

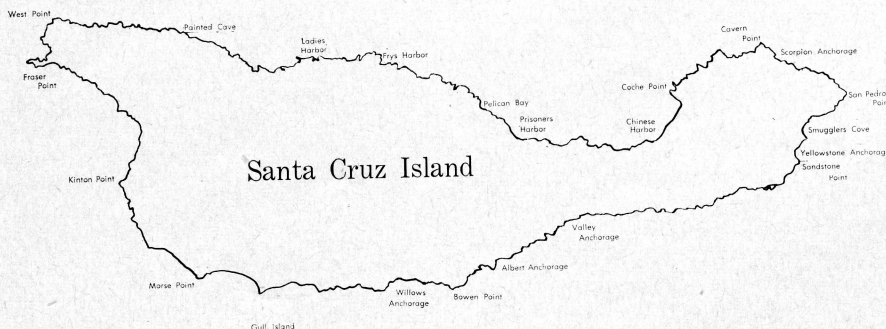
On June 27, 1542, Juan Rodrigues Cabrillo sailed from Puerto de Navidad, Mexico, on two small caravels, San Salvador and La Vittoria, on a voyage of exploration that was destined to make him the first known white man to set foot in California and the Channel Islands. Although a native of Portugal, Cabrillo was in the service of Spain charged with the task of searching for the "Northwest Passage". Cabrillo entered San Diego Bay September 28, 1542, a date which can be remembered as when the first Europeans set foot on California soil. On October 7, he visited the first of the offshore islands, and by October 15 had sighted the island which later came to be known as Santa Cruz.

The second visitor to this island was Sebastian Vizcaino in 1602, who became noted for naming some of the other Channel Islands; followed by other explorers, Don Miguel Costanso and the Englishman George Vancouver. Then in the spring of 1769, the San Antonio, commanded

by Juan Perez, was blown off course by one of the frequent heavy gales in the area, and entered one of the bays on the island. While the San Antonio was there, a priest from the ship lost a small crucifix ashore. Saddened by this loss, he was about to leave the bay aboard the San Antonio several days later, when friendly natives returned the cross, having spent many hours searching for it. Then and there the crew entered the name Santa Cruz, meaning "Sacred Cross", on their chart to commemorate the event.

Another interesting story relates the naming of Prisoners Harbor on this island. In 1830, the Maria Ester commanded by a Captain Holmes, arrived at Santa Barbara Harbor with a shipload of eighty prisoners recruited from Mexican prisons to colonize the town. The residents were very alarmed over this and would not allow the more undesirable ones to come ashore. However, padres from the mission at Santa Barbara provided cattle and grain for the prisoners and asked Captain Holmes to take them to Santa Cruz Island where they could establish a small colony. At the island, the bay where the Maria Ester landed the prisoners and their supplies very soon came to be known as Prisoners Harbor. The story goes that a fire destroyed their supplies after they were there a short time, and the disheartened prisoners fashioned a raft and endeavored to return to the mainland. The prevailing winds blew them across the channel and they landed at Carpenteria, where they were finally allowed to settle.

Santa Cruz Island was granted by the Spanish crown to Andres Castillero. He set up a ranch on the island and in 1865 Justinian Caire came over from France to manage it. Caire was so amazed at the similarity of this island to his French Mediterranean coast that in 1869 he bought the island. He set about to establish an old world colony in the beautiful central valley, patterned after a typical European nineteenth century estate. By 1900 nearly a hundred people from France and Italy had come to this beautiful old world settlement. Out of brick fired from island clay, they built living quarters, stables, blacksmith and wagon shops, a bakery, laundry, a quaint little church complete with stained glass windows, and enormous wineries. They planted lush vineyards and made wine not only for their own consumption, but for use on the mainland as well. Their



wine was of such fine quality that soon the island came to be known as producing some of the finest wine in California.

Justinian Caire died in 1898, and with his heirs settling in San Francisco, the estate came to be operated by a superintendent. During the depression the colony dwindled to a point where they could no longer sustain themselves. Caire's relatives offered to sell the island to the Government to make into a state or national park; and indeed, this island with its beautiful central valley and enchanting old world atmosphere would have made a wonderful historical monument! However, they could get no definite response from the government and in 1937 they sold all but 8,000 acres of the island to Edwin L. Stanton, a Los Angeles business man, for one million dollars. The parcel they retained is now operated as a sheep ranch by heirs of the Caire family: Mrs. Ambrose Gherini of Hillsborough, California, and her two sons, attorneys Pier Gherini of Santa Barbara and Francis Gherini of Oxnard. The ranch is at the east end of the Island, opposite Smugglers Cove.

The rest of the island is operated by Stanton as a very successful cattle ranch. In fact, it is one of the largest cattle ranches in the country and the island beef is renowned as being of finest quality. The ranch headquarters is in Arroyo Principal, the island's central valley, and uses the old buildings built by Caire in the 1880's as bunkhouses, storage buildings, machine shops, garages, and cattle barns. Only two are kept vacant, "The Apartment", a two story French-Mediterranean type house complete with many picturesque wrought iron balconies, and the quaint little church



Scorpion Anchorage, a mile and a half from the east end of Santa Cruz Island.

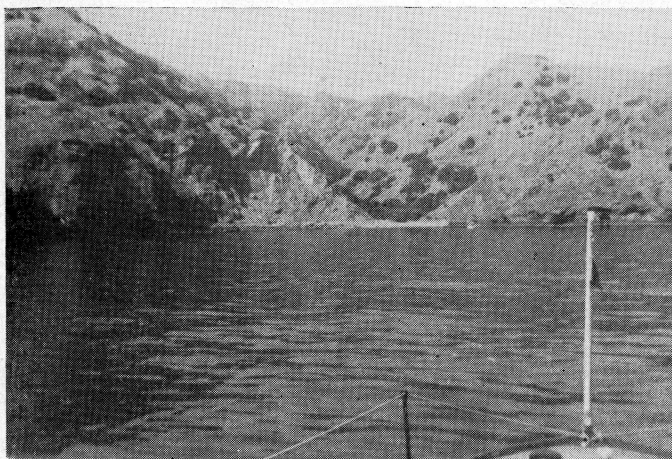
with its stained glass windows.

Since February 1949, the Navy has maintained a small base with thirty men atop one of the island's highest peaks as a relay and coordinating station between Point Mugu and San Nicolas Island. The prime function of the Santa Cruz Navy Island Facility is to provide operational communications and instrumentation required to flight-test guided missiles.

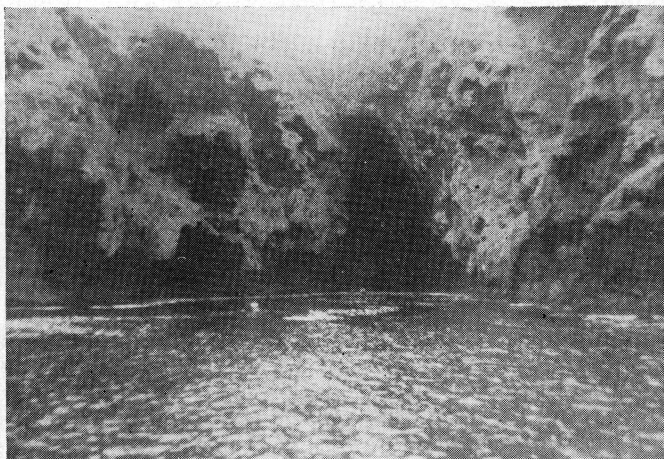
Such is the story of Santa Cruz Island; and although the main part of its history centers about the central valley, each harbor and cove has a story in itself. Pelican Cove, for instance, was once a fisherman's paradise with a clubhouse and scattered cottages. Now these buildings are only disintegrated shells of their former elegance. In 1926-1929 the breakwater at Santa Barbara Harbor was built from rock quarried out of Frys Harbor on Santa Cruz. Still visible there is a toppling derrick, rusty tracks, and the remains of the mess hall and cabins. And there is famous Painted Cave—three miles east of the

west end of the Island. The cave, formed by a fracture in the lava formation, has a Gothic-like entrance 150 feet high that gradually lowers through a series of chambers hundreds of feet into the island. On a calm day you can take a good-sized boat quite a ways into the cave and then proceed further by skiff. Once inside, if you can stand the bedlam of sound the sea lions produce at having their abode invaded, you will at once notice the brilliance of color. The walls of the cave are stained with oxide of iron and copper sulphate, strata of yellow formations, and red, ochre, and green lichens. Truly a beautiful sight!

Although yachtsmen are forbidden to land on the island, this beauty of nature can be, and must be, viewed by those cruising these waters. In addition to a fascinating historical background, Santa Cruz also has many fine harbors and coves with suitable anchorages available to those wishing to visit this "Island of the Sacred Cross."



Frys Harbor at Santa Cruz Island where rock was quarried to build the breakwater at Santa Barbara Harbor.



Painted Cave at Santa Cruz Island has a Gothic-like entrance 150 feet high.